

## **Current Events**

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### **Post-Olympic Reflection**

Although it's been a couple of months since we've been immersed in news coming from Japan about the 2020/2021 Olympic games, it's still worth considering how these events are understood in the modern worldview of our country. The "Top Story of the Day" on Monday, August 9 (at least according to my newsfeed), was how the US athletes "restored the soul of America" through their performances at the Olympics. The phrase came from President Joe Biden addressing the American athletes, speaking about how proud he and all Americans are of their accomplishments. Specific references were made to the standout stars and teams who won the most medals or who broke world records. There was nothing too surprising in the address to the athletes; all in all, it was a refrain of common clichés you would expect from any president congratulating those who represented their country in a global effort.

During the Tokyo Olympic Games, the US won the overall medal count—pulling in 113 total medals, with 39 gold, 41 silver, and 33 bronze. This makes the eighth consecutive Olympics in which the United States took home the most medals. The 39 gold medals were also the most of any nation, beating out China's total (38 gold medals) in the last hours of the Olympics. Such a narrow victory is thrilling, especially when it comes over rival nations China and Russia (or more correctly, the "Russian Olympic Committee," since Russian athletes were banned from directly representing their country for two years due to illegal doping). With "God Bless the U.S.A." ringing in the background, we are tempted to stand alongside our president, waving the number one sign in the air and making proud remarks about how we are always the best. We could then go to sleep at night thinking that everything is right in the world because those representing freedom and liberty prevailed against our Communist foes yet again.

That's how many in our country would like us to view the Olympics, but there are other lessons for us to learn from Tokyo. Significant worldview implications are at stake in how we view and celebrate the games and its athletes. The Olympics are a grand spectacle, for sure, open to all nations. For Christians, it is a grand spectacle that clearly showcases a fallen world that is bereft with sin, a world and its peoples that are looking for fulfillment, recognition, endorsements, and assurance that their whole life's focus up to this point has not been in vain. The Olympics, in part, remind me of the final hours of the Tower of Babel, where the nations of the world were assembled with a singular goal yet worked against each other in its pursuit. Like the Tower of Babel, the proud Olympic village is soon abandoned as spectators and athletes disperse and a site once teeming with activity, chatter, and laughter becomes a desolate place, often never used again.

For those who followed this summer's Olympic events, you would do well to think deeply about the stories that came out of the Olympics and how the news media reported them. Consider, for example, how the secular media presented the stories of transgender athletes, or how it framed

the issue of mental health after one prominent athlete pulled out of the games for a time. Though wrapped in an American flag and cloaked in the language of virtue, these stories tell us a lot about the priorities of this world and how they are becoming the norm in our country.

Much can also be learned from watching the athletes and their responses to victory and adversity. Covering these personal stories of triumph and tragedy is what the Olympic broadcasts do well when they choose to do so. From some of these stories a young person can readily observe the selfish response of athletes when they did not win a coveted gold medal, some of whom openly blamed others for cheating as an excuse for why they lost. But we can also learn from the proper responses of athletes that took place this year. Examples in this category include stories not of triumph but of failure while doing their best, of those who help others on the track at the expense of their own medal chances, of those who give up spots on a relay to someone who is more deserving, of teams who can celebrate with their teammates but also congratulate the opponents throughout the match, and of those who win gold but remain humble and contrite. The Olympics are a spectacle of human nature at every level.

More importantly, however, consider the declaration that the American athletes “restored the soul of America” through their performances. What does that even mean? Most Americans will forget who medaled in a specific event by the time of the next Olympics. Case in point, the most Googled phrase during the whole of the Olympics was “medal count.” Maybe that is what the “soul of America” means. We send the most athletes of any nation, we train more athletes in our country than any other, and we leave the game with the most medals (eight times in a row). But we are less interested in *who* the athletes are or even what event they won their medal in—we just need to know that our country emerged with more medals, preferably gold, than any other nation. The Olympics are over and we are free to move on to the college and professional athletes of specific sports we enjoy and hope they represent us well by winning a title too. Triumph and victory above all else!

Child of God, may we not be so shallow in our view and appreciation of sports and athletes. Whether in viewing or participating, may we strive to receive the prize, but not to obtain a corruptible crown. Our goal in all of life must be the incorruptible crown that cannot be attained by physical exertion (1 Cor. 9:24–25). Our soul cannot be restored through an athletic achievement, through the attainment of a medal, or by one representing us as a member of an earthly nation. Consider the wording of 2 Timothy 4:7–8, wherein we are called to run the race *set before us* (not always the one we chose, Hebrews 12:1) and be confident that through him we have fought a *good* fight, we have *finished* the course, and we have *kept the faith*. Henceforth there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the *righteous judge*, shall give at that day: and not to us only, but unto all them also that *love his appearing*. Deep truths for us to consider as we reflect on the Olympic events that have now finished and our calling to run a race for the glory of our Lord.

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